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SUBJECT: Media Reaction - Consulate closures

On July 24, the independent Stockholm morning daily "Dagens Nyheter" in its main editorial opined on the Swedish Government's announcement that it is closing four Consulate-Generals and one Embassy under the headline 'Embarrassing for Sweden':

"Until the turn of the year, Sweden leads the work within the European Union. During this time, Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and Foreign Minister Carl Bildt will be representing the EU internationally. The Government is hoping that Sweden will be perceived as an engaging and credible nation in foreign policy. That PR-message does not fit with the decisions made in Stockholm. Yesterday it became clear that the Government is closing its Consulate-Generals in New York, Los Angeles, Canton and Kaliningrad. In addition, the Embassy in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo will be closed - last summer the Embassy in Manila met the same fate....

"One of Sweden's main acts during the EU Presidency is to increase Baltic Sea cooperation. Yet, the Government has in a short space of time, closed the Hamburg and Gdansk consulates. Now Kaliningrad is on the list....

"Even more strange is the announcement about Sweden's representation in the United States. The Consulate-Generals in New York and Los Angeles have been of great benefit for relatively little money through the years. Apart from handling extensive amounts of passports, visas and other permits, these institutions have marketed Sweden in two of the world's metropolises....

"Considering the size of the United States, a strengthened presence would have been expected, for example, in Chicago and Houston. Now the Government is doing the opposite and imagines that an Embassy in Washington will be able to handle everything between California and New York with the aid of some EU states. If one may say so, it is both a naive and stupid expectation....

"Why Sweden should have to make the same mistake is difficult to understand [referring to Denmark's closing of embassies in the 1980's] but symptomatic for Carl Bildt's view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Administration. Ever since Bildt became Foreign Minister, he has shown an absent-minded interest in the MFA's activities. Bildt is noticeably absent and carries out internal information and foreign policy via his blog, which is sometimes reflected in his statements, such as when he compared the Russian invasion of Georgia to Nazi-Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia....

"The discontent at the ministry is widespread and growing. It is disdainfully said that Bildt is carrying out a semi-private foreign policy, the primary aim of which is to secure a nice international job for himself....

"If Sweden is not going to have presence with a consulate in Manhattan in New York, you have to ask why we should be present in the world at all."

SILVERMAN